



HEAD START
In Focus

Ongoing Child Outcomes Efforts

Head Start is a comprehensive child development program that encompasses all aspects of the child, including social competence and school readiness. Since 1996, the Head Start Program Performance Standards have called for teachers to conduct ongoing assessments of each child's progress. Reauthorization of the Head Start Act in 1998 requires local programs to analyze assessment information on children's progress and to use this outcome information in both their program self-assessments and subsequent quality improvement efforts. These requirements were established to ensure positive child outcomes for all Head Start children.

Head Start grantees and delegate agencies gather information in all aspects of development and learning, including physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and language. Upon entry to the program, each child receives required screenings to confirm that he or she is in good health and developing well. This initial screening and assessment addresses the child's overall health status, developmental strengths, needs, and areas of identified concern, such as possible serious delay or disability.

The requirements for child observation and ongoing assessment continue throughout the child's enrollment in Head Start. Staff and parents gather information on an ongoing basis to document each child's progress toward positive child outcomes in language, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical development—including the 13 Congressionally-mandated indicators of learning. Programs select, develop, or adapt an instrument or set of tools for ongoing assessment of children's progress that aligns with their locally-chosen curriculum. In these ways, staff, parents, and programs support each child's progress toward stated goals.

Child outcome information from groups of children becomes part of the data considered by agencies as they engage in self-assessment to determine how well the program is meeting its goals and objectives, and how well it is implementing the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other regulations. The results of the self-assessment contribute to continuous program planning and program improvement.

The [National Reporting System](#) will enhance current systems by providing additional information about groups of children to use in understanding the progress children are making in acquiring literacy, numeracy, and language skills. However, since the NRS will assess only four- and five-year-olds, and only on a limited set of indicators, the NRS information can only be supplemental to local assessment procedures and analysis of child outcomes. Programs will need to continue to use the comprehensive assessment systems and tools they have developed to respond to the Head Start Program Performance Standards and to meet local needs.

For current information on this and other key issues affecting the Head Start community, visit the Head Start Bureau Web site at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb or www.headstartinfo.org

